

Gábor Barna ed., Rítusok, folklórszövegek [Rites and Folklore Texts] (Paulus Hungarus - Kairosz Kiadó, 2004).

This volume is a thematic collection of thesis papers written by the students of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at Szeged, Hungary. We must point out that this department is a scientific centre for the research of popular religion in Hungary following the heritage of Sándor Bálint, an eminent researcher of popular religion and cultural history, under the supervision of Gábor Barna, the present head of department.

"While most of the studies in this volume represent the first scholarly contributions of their authors, some are surprisingly precise and accomplished."

The researchers of modern folkloristics might find Central and Eastern Europe a real delicacy. Eric Hobsbawm articulates in relation to invented traditions that changing societies and those in crisis tend to create more traditions. Often politicians or institutions such as the church create these traditions. A significant part of these are connected to the strengthening of identity and reviving customs, and as such they are closely related to religious life as well. The period of the political change, the transition from socialism into democracy generated changes in both the profane and sacred rites. The invented traditions of the socialist dictatorship faded or disappeared. The most striking celebration is the transformation of the May 1st parade—Labour Day without content, missing every attribute intended to enhance festivity.

Similar transitions happened in the case of the name-giving ceremonies studied by Bernadett Kiss. These name-giving ceremonies endeavoured to substitute baptism during the atheist regime. The socialist celebrations were replaced or coexisted with new celebrations, which often revived once lived folk customs. The Rose Festival in Földeák, carefully examined by Barbara Sándor, is especially interesting in regard to its tradition-creating trend. The study focuses on a celebration, which clearly shows the encounter between sacred and profane culture, and the interaction between high and popular culture. A parish priest who had earlier encountered such a festival during a journey to France, introduced the Rose Festival. Yet the priest tailored the festival to fit the need of the locals so it would survive the preventive community censure. The new celebration was organized on the patronal festival of the local church until 1948. In 1989, after the political changes, the Rose Festival was reorganized and the village feast turned into a tourist attraction. In addition, many other invented traditions (reorganized after the political change) are based on tourism and these are not only organized for the local community but for tourists as well. These festivals use the characteristic feature of the region to make the settlement more attractive for the tourists (See the essay of Margit Mikó about the Festival of Fish Soup in Baja, one of the most successful modern invented tradition.)

The church and religious life were also affected by the changes of these traditions. We cannot find as much new and invented ones here, however, the revival of once-lived customs is more significant. The most spectacular process is the strengthening of pilgrimage. From time to time thousands go on a pilgrimage to Csíksomlyó, which gained new content besides its religious nature. It turned to be a pan-Hungarian pilgrimage where expressing national identity became an important characteristic. Erika Vass' study is

about Máriaradna, the once most favourite pilgrimage place of the dwellers of Szeged. The study interprets pilgrimage as a ritual performance. During this symbolic event pilgrims behave in accordance with certain rules and identify with the sufferings of Christ and Mary.

Several authors of this volume employ sources that have rarely, or never, been used by Hungarian ethnologists before. In this respect Bernadette Papp's and Krisztina Frauhammer's studies are outstanding. Papp examines apocryphal elements of pulp literature. Frauhammer studies the intercessions books of a pilgrimage place called Máriakálnok. These studies are not only novel in a sense that the authors examined relatively undiscovered sources but they also have a modern perspective within the framework of the so-called "traditional Hungarian Ethnology".

While most of the studies in this volume represent the first scholarly contributions of their authors, some are surprisingly precise and accomplished. Besides participant observation the authors make the most of historic sources and archives as well. In this respect Mónika Erdélyi's study of March 15th, 1849 is worth mentioning. She examines one of the greatest Hungarian national holiday and concludes that it is a "partly invented tradition". The young ethnologists have solid knowledge of the significant scholars of customs and rites (Victor Turner, Arnold van Gennep, Eric Hobsbawm). Although some of the studies are only descriptive and lack any conclusions, the book still gives a comprehensive picture of the young workshop of a young discipline.

István Povedák, ELTE University, Budapest

© 2005 by Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe. All rights reserved. ISSN 1553-9962
